

CAN INFANTS BE BORN AGAIN?

January 10, 2000 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, wayoflife.org, fbns@wayoflife.org) - The following is by George Zeller, Associate Pastor, Middletown Bible Church, 349 East Street, Middletown, CT 06457. 203-346-0907 (voice), georgezeller@juno.com (e-mail) --

The NEW GENEVA STUDY BIBLE was published in 1995 by a group of Reformed scholars. R.C.Sproul wrote the introduction and was the general editor. Other editors: James Boice, Edmund Clowney, Roger Nicole, J.I.Packer.

In the introduction Sproul says, "Since the time of the first Geneva Bible, a multitude of English translations and study Bibles have appeared. None of these study Bibles has incorporated a summary of Reformed theology. The NEW GENEVA STUDY BIBLE contains a modern restatement of Reformation truth in its comments and theological notes. It's purpose is to present the light of the Reformation afresh.

Knowing the impact of the Scofield Study Bible, these Reformed men wanted to produce a study Bible that would have similar impact, only in the direction away from dispensationalism towards Reformed theology.

On page 1664 there is a note called "Regeneration: The New Birth." Part of this note reads as follows: "Regeneration is the gift of God's grace. It is the immediate, supernatural work of the Holy Spirit wrought in us. Its effect is to quicken us to spiritual life from spiritual death. It changes the disposition of our souls, inclining our hearts to God. The fruit of regeneration is faith. Regeneration precedes faith. Infants can be born again, although the faith that they exercise cannot be as visible as that of adults."

If you (wrongly) assume that regeneration precedes faith, then it logically follows that an infant can be regenerated. According to Reformed theology, regeneration takes place part from faith by a sovereign act of God. A person does not believe to be regenerated, but rather a person is regenerated so he can believe. If God can regenerate an adult apart from faith then God can certainly regenerate an infant apart from faith. [Remember, an infant is incapable of understanding the gospel and exercising saving faith]. Of course, Reformed theology, for the most part, also promotes infant baptism.

DOES REGENERATION PRECEDE FAITH?

By George Zeller

Regeneration is the sovereign act of God whereby He imparts His very life and His very nature to the believing sinner (John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5). Man's first birth is natural; his second birth is spiritual and supernatural. His first birth makes him a member of a fallen race; his second birth makes him a member of a redeemed race. His first birth gives him a depraved nature (Eph. 2:3); his second birth makes him partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The moment a person is born again he receives a new life (John 6:47; 1 John 5:12) and a new position as a child of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2). In short, he is a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Today there are those of a reformed persuasion who teach that regeneration precedes faith. They would say that a person must be born again before he believes. They would say that a person must have God's LIFE before he can believe on Christ. C. D. Cole states it this way: "The Calvinist says that life must precede faith, and is logically the cause of faith. Faith did not cause the new birth, the new birth caused faith."

Why do such men teach this? The doctrine of man's total depravity has been carried to the extreme by some Calvinists resulting in a wrong understanding of man's inability. They believe that the sinner is dead in sin and totally unable to respond to the gospel. They believe he first must be regenerated and only then will he be able to believe the gospel.

The Philippian jailer once asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). If Paul had been an extreme Calvinist he might have said, "You can do nothing to be saved, absolutely nothing. You are dead in sin and totally unable to exercise saving faith. You are totally unable to respond to God until you are regenerated!" How different was the answer Paul gave: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

We agree that no one can believe on Christ apart from God's great and gracious working in the heart which involves both enabling and enlightenment (John 6:44,65; Matthew 11:27; 16:16-17; Acts 16:14). It is interesting that God sometimes commands a person to do what in himself he is totally unable to do. One example involves the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-5). Christ gave him the command, "Stretch forth thine hand!" How could he do this if he suffered from paralysis? Christ commanded, the man obeyed and God enabled! Christ enabled him to do the impossible! So also the sinner is commanded to believe on Christ. If the sinner fails to obey this command then he is guilty of disobeying the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8). He will never be able to use this excuse: "Lord, the reason I did not believe on Christ was because I was totally depraved and unable to believe." No, the reason men do not come to Christ is because they refuse to do so: "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

Does regeneration precede faith? Actually they both take place in the same moment of time. The moment a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ he is regenerated (born again). The moment he receives Christ by faith he also receives God's gift of eternal life. It all happens in an instant of time. Yet logically as we think about this great transaction, we must put an order to it. Does the Bible indicate that a person must be regenerated so that he can believe or does the Bible teach that a person must believe in order to be regenerated? Do we need life in order to believe or do we need to believe in order to have life?

The Bible clearly teaches this: believe and thou shalt live! "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:15). The extreme Calvinist says, "live and thou shalt believe!" Please notice that John 1:12 does not say this: "But as many as have been regenerated, to them gave He the power to believe on His Name, even to those who have become the children of God." Notice also that John 20:31 says, "believing ye might have life." It does not say, "having life ye might believe." In his helpless and hopeless condition the sinner is told to LOOK to the Lord Jesus Christ AND LIVE (John 3:14-16; Numbers 21). [We sing the hymn, Look and Live. The extreme Calvinist should rename the hymn: Live and Look.] The extreme Calvinist teaches that a person must have life in order to believe. The Lord Jesus taught that a person must believe (come to Christ) in order to have life (John 5:40). Why do people not believe on Christ? Is it because they have not been regenerated or because they refuse to come to Christ by faith (John 5:40; 2 Thess. 2:10,12)?

If regeneration precedes faith, then this would make faith unnecessary since the person would already be saved. If a person is regenerated, then he is born of God and a member of God's family. If you are a member of God's family then you are already saved so what need is there for faith?

Charles Spurgeon, a strong Calvinist himself, recognized the folly of saying that the sinner must be regenerated before he can believe: "If I am to preach the faith in Christ to a man

who is regenerated, then the man, being regenerated, is saved already, and it is an unnecessary and ridiculous thing for me to preach Christ to him, and bid him to believe in order to be saved when he is saved already, being regenerate. Am I only to preach faith to those who have it? Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners.”

For a moment, let’s assume that what the extreme Calvinists are saying is true. If regeneration precedes faith, then what must a sinner do to be regenerated? The extreme Calvinists have never satisfactorily answered this. Shedd’s answer is typical. Because the sinner cannot believe, he is instructed to perform the following duties: (1) Read and hear the divine Word. (2) Give serious application of the mind to the truth. (3) Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration.

Roy Aldrich’s response to this is penetrating: “A doctrine of total depravity that excludes the possibility of faith must also exclude the possibilities of hearing the Word, giving serious application to divine truth and praying for the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration. The extreme Calvinist deals with a rather lively spiritual corpse after all.”

The problem with this position is that it perverts the gospel. The sinner is told that the condition of salvation is prayer instead of faith. How contrary to Acts 16:31 where the sinner is not told to pray for conviction and regeneration. The sinner is simply told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

George Zeller